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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: May 13 UNESCO Conference of Donors for the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Kosovo

Ref: STATE 88192 (notal)

¶1. Summary: During the Conference of Donors for the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Kosovo organized by UNESCO, donors pledged US\$10 million, including U.S. \$1 million from the United States, for the restoration, protection and enhancement of Christian and Islamic monuments and traditional secular buildings in Kosovo. End Summary

¶2. The May 13 donors conference, organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Council of Europe and the European Commission, brought together over 50 Member States and 15 foundations and nongovernmental organizations. Donors pledged a total of \$10 million for the restoration, protection and enhancement of Christian and Islamic monuments and traditional secular buildings in Kosovo that were damaged or in need of emergency restoration. The main donors -- besides the European Commission, which had already allotted Euros 2 million, and the Provisional Institutions of Self Government of Kosovo, which already allotted Euros 5.7 million -- were: the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, Turkey and the United States. Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Netherlands and Portugal, as well as three NGOs, pledged technical assistance. Other UNESCO members expressed their intention to contribute financially after they have studied the proposals contained in the working document provided to them and whose quality they praised. Louise Oliver, the U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, announced a pledge of \$1 Million on behalf of the U.S. government.

¶3. Ambassador Oliver delivered talking points (reftel) and added: "This pledge represents a large increase in U.S. assistance and reflects our continued commitment to cultural preservation in Kosovo. Since 2000, the U.S. Mission in Pristina has contributed nearly \$100,000 to various cultural projects, including monument preservation, restoration of historic manuscripts, and a joint project with Kosovo's Ministry of Culture to develop an inventory system for the management of cultural heritage sites."

¶4. Participants agreed on the need to consider Kosovo's cultural heritage as a whole and not to fund its conservation on the basis of religious or ethnic criteria. To this end, the Director-General of UNESCO suggested that UNESCO -- in close cooperation with the Council of Europe, the European Commission, UNMIK and representatives of the member states concerned -- develop an action plan mapping out priorities and measures for the protection and restoration of Kosovar cultural heritage. The DG also announced that following the recent cooperation agreement between Kosovo Provisional Institutions and the Serbian Orthodox Church, the European Agency for Reconstruction will begin spending the Euros 2 million earmarked last autumn for the restoration of churches damaged or destroyed during the violence of March 2004.

¶5. Attending the meeting were Vuk Draskovic, Foreign Minister Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro; Blendi Klosi, Albanian Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sports for Albania; Petko Dragoanov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria; Soren Jessen-Petersen, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo; Gabriella Battani-Dragoni, of the Council of Europe; Fabrizi Barbasa, Acting Director General for Enlargement, of the European Commission; Koichiro Matsuura, the Director General of UNESCO; and Goran Svilanovic, former Foreign Minister of Serbia and Chair of the Stability Pact.

¶6. Controversy in the conference room: After lunch the Ambassador for Serbia-Montenegro expressed outrage at the distribution of a brochure that "rewrote" history, attributing Serbian-built monuments to Albanian culture. The document was not officially distributed by any delegation, but was quickly associated with a member of the UNMIK delegation, Astrit Harraqija, the Minister of Culture of Kosovo. Apparently, the document was prepared in Kosovo for this conference. The Minister had not informed his delegation, nor anyone else of the 20 copies of the brochure

that he had brought. Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen took the floor to say he was sorry for the distribution of the document which he retracted and asked to recuperate all copies (they managed to recuperate 13 copies).

¶7. After a press conference held at UNESCO the same day, a Swiss journalist approached Ambassador Oliver to express surprise in the US financial support of cultural heritage. When asked to comment further, the Ambassador referred the journalist to her statement: "The preservation of cultural heritage is something all our countries and organizations can and should support," while emphasizing that the U.S. views the preservation of cultural heritage as a priority.

¶8. Comment: This Swiss journalist's remark points out the U.S. can really gain points when its involvement in cultural preservation is made public, and UNESCO is the perfect place to showcase US bilateral initiatives in this area. We would appreciate assistance in identifying and promoting other relevant and timely USG programs and initiatives in this area.

OLIVER